Financial pressure on unpaid carers unsustainable

“I am anxious and scared of what our living costs will be in the coming months. I’m unable to sleep and worried about surviving” (unpaid carer, February 2022)

Over half (51%) of unpaid carers in Wales are currently unable to manage their monthly expenses, latest research by Carers UK has revealed.

A UK-wide survey of 3,300 unpaid carers was carried out by the charity in February.

80% of carers in Wales said they felt stressed and anxious when thinking about their finances. Many said they were having to take difficult steps to manage their monthly expenses:

- 66% have cut back on heating
- 10% have already fallen into arrears with their energy bills

In the months ahead:

- 48% thought that they would not be able to heat their home to a safe level.
- 41% are worried they will have to use a foodbank.

The findings come as the charity launches a Cost of Living campaign.

Unpaid carers often face additional costs associated with keeping those they care for safe, providing extra care, nutrition, and support. It is common to have higher energy costs when caring for someone who is unwell or frail, to keep them warm, and to help manage their condition. Special equipment may be needed which can be costly to run and food bills higher because of nutritional requirements they may need.

Transport costs can also be higher because the person cared for is less able to walk or needs to be accompanied to many different medical appointments.

One carer who responded to the survey commented:

“Our son relies on life saving equipment which must be constant and available at all times i.e., a hospital pressure mattress, an oxygen nebulizer, suction hoist, air conditioning, heating and so on.”

Another said:

“Mum is bedbound with advanced Parkinsons so she needs the house to be quite warm especially when she is being bed-bathed, etc. but we can't afford to keep the heating turned up high.”

Gary cares for his wife Natasha who has needed care for four years following a spinal injury, resulting in him giving up work as a taxi driver. Gary said:

“We rely on Universal Credit and we’ve had to use foodbanks. I've noticed our food and energy bills rising sharply. Natasha’s medical condition means that our home
must be kept warm. If it isn’t, she suffers pain in her legs and feet. I’m worried I will have to go back to work if I cannot make ends meet, even though my wife needs a lot of care.”

Costs for carers have been further compounded as day care and other services and support outside the home have closed or been greatly reduced since the start of the pandemic and Millions of families continue to provide essential extra care.

The cost of living has been increasing for everyone across the UK since early 2021, but in December 2021 inflation reached its highest recorded level since 1992 at 5.2%. The Bank of England has predicted it will reach 7.25% in April. Carers are more likely to be in financially precarious situations and less able to cope with these additional costs.

Claire Morgan, Director of Carers Wales, said:

“We are seeing unprecedented levels of stress and financial worries piled on unpaid carers in Wales. Many were already struggling to manage their monthly expenses before the soaring energy prices and inflation increasing the price of essentials. Now 51% of Welsh carers are unable to manage their monthly expenses.

“Many are dipping into savings, using credit cards, being pushed into debt and cutting back on essentials to keep the person they care for warm and healthy. They are extremely anxious about how they are going to continue to manage. Nearly half of carers think the rising energy costs will impact on their health and the health of the person they care for. If carers are unable to care safely and effectively, they may ultimately require more substantial interventions from health or social care services.

“Carers are propping up our health and care system at a huge cost to their own personal health, finances and ability to stay in work. Now the picture is even bleaker, with increasing costs forcing them to cut back on food, on heat, and more than ever they are worried that they will be pushed into debt.

“There is an urgent need for targeted support for unpaid carers now. Thousands more are being pushed into poverty, including in-work poverty, that will have a lasting impact on their finances and quality of life.”

To ensure carers are supported during this extremely difficult time, Carers Wales is calling on the Welsh Government to:

- In recognition of the immense efforts of unpaid carers providing care throughout the pandemic, and the rising cost of living which will impact carers particularly hard, provide unpaid carers with a recognition payment similar to those already given to paid care workers in Wales.
- Include Carers’ Allowance as a qualifying benefit for the next round of the Winter Fuel Support Scheme.
• Encourage local authorities to promote discretionary fund schemes to carers, such as through collaborating with local carers centres and organisations.

• To support carers facing hardship in the short, medium and long term, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Carers should consider how the Welsh Government and partners can seek to reduce poverty amongst carers. This should look at all aspects of poverty amongst carers and identify measures within the Welsh Government’s remit to reduce this.

• Extend free bus pass provision to include carers when they are not travelling with the cared for person, such as when they are travelling to visit them or pick up prescriptions.

Additionally, the Welsh Government should call upon the UK Government to:

• Increase Carer’s Allowance and other benefits in line with current inflation predictions for April 2022. Carer’s Allowance is set to rise by only 3.1% in April 2022, while inflation (CPI) is expected to reach 7.25%.

• Immediately extend the Warm Home Discount scheme to ensure that it include carers. This is in recognition of the additional energy costs often faced by unpaid carers.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors:

Media contact
Please contact the Carers Wales office for more information or interviews on: Beth.Evans@carerswales.org - 02920811370

About this research:

Carers UK carried out an online survey during February 2022. A total of 196 carers and former carers responded to the survey in Wales – we have only included responses from the 187 people who are currently providing care in this report. Compared to the carer population as a whole, respondents to this survey were more likely to be caring for a high number of hours every week. Of respondents to the survey:

• 54% care for 90 or more hours every week, while 16% care for 50–89 hours, 23% care for 20–49 hours, and 6% care for 1–19 hours a week.

As not all respondents completed every question in the survey, a number of the figures given in this report, are based upon responses from fewer than 187 carers.